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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR'S CONVERSATION WITH LAGOS GOVERNOR BOLA TINUBU

1. SUMMARY. Recently re-elected Lagos State Governor Bola Tinubu continues to push his three-part plan for improving the state through privatization, housing construction and environmental clean-up. In meetings July 23 with senior Mission officials, Tinubu outlined new road rehabilitation and technology initiatives that specifically address the state's decrepit infrastructure. END SUMMARY.

2. On July 23, Ambassador Jeter, Consul General Hinson-Jones and EDDI Director Sarah Moten met Governor Tinubu in his Lagos office. The meeting was followed by a tour of a new computer center in the state government's office complex and a joint ceremony to award 50 scholarships under the Ambassador's Girls Scholarship Program.

3. Tinubu said he plans to rehabilitate all roads in the state, whether Federal or State controlled. Lagos State needs to step into this traditionally federal role because the central government has "abandoned" the state's highways by failing to pay 7 billion naira owed to the state for road maintenance, Tinubu said.

4. Road maintenance is particularly important to Tinubu to attract foreign investment. Tinubu said he realizes a decrepit, over-used highway system discourages investors of all kinds, including those who might put money into an urban transit program. Stating that Lagos had "cars-per-road" ratio of 222 to 1, compared to 11 for the rest of country, the Governor stressed Lagos needs to take ameliorative action now before the road situation got worse.

5. Tinubu also wants an additional one naira per liter increase in the fuel pump price to be directly channeled into maintenance of all roads in the state. "If you don't put money on the infrastructure of Lagos State, you're just wasting it," he said. Such a fuel tax may result in geographic disparities in fuel prices, Tinubu said, something that he said is necessary to let the market decide what price is best for gasoline in Nigeria.

6. Also on the subject of roads, Tinubu praised his meeting with NSC Senior African Director Jendayi Frazier on the margins of the recent POTUS visit. As a result of the meeting, Tinubu said he plans to work with the Governor of Georgia to improve urban transportation in Lagos.

7. With federal assistance lacking, Tinubu said he plans to finance this work through increased tax revenues that result from more efficient tax collection and accountability. In the new Transnational Computer Technology center, Tinubu's administration trains state bureaucrats to use computers to collect, sort and check tax information and other data like health statistics and water usage patterns. Through the center's efforts, 20 of the state's 36 administrative zones are already connected to a central database, with the rest scheduled to be on-line by next year. The center's staff said tax revenue has already increased four-fold, with another two-fold increase expected by next year.

8. In other remarks, Tinubu said Lagos is talking with the World Bank to install a 1000-megawatt generator for Lagos alone so that the State can operate independently of the national grid. He also discussed technical education and said he wants a series of "alternative schools" or "community colleges" to act as intermediate skills training centers feeding the state's manufacturing industry. Lastly, Tinubu outlined the state's need for a new wastemanagement center and his work to improve the usage of drainage dams from 20% to 70% efficiency.

19. COMMENT. The real needs of Lagos State are monumental and continue to challenge Tinubu. However, he is attempting to respond and his efforts at infrastructural improvements are noticed and appreciated by the Lagosians who give him high marks for trying to build foundations for sustainable development in the State. Tinubu intends to follow up his urban transportation and other development ideas by seeking partnerships with the state of Georgia.
END COMMENT.

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